

There's More to Bone Health Than Calcium

A list of nutrients important
listed at tinyurl.com/hwbo

By Jaci Hoffman

Didn't mother always say, "Drink your milk so you will have strong bones"?

Just Google "Is milk bad for bones?" and view the top headlines: Debunking the Milk Myth: Why Milk is Bad for You; New Study Shatters Milk Myth for Strong Bones; Milk May Cause Osteoporosis.

According to Bloomberg.com, Americans rank No. 3 in the consumption of milk. It would seem our bones should be among the healthiest. Yet a study published in 2000 by the University of California, San Francisco showed that American women age 50 and older have one of the highest rates of hip fractures in the world. The study further noted a correlation with dietary protein intake.

In 1986 a Harvard researcher produced a graph that demonstrated a nearly direct relationship between calcium intake and hip fractures — the more calcium, the more fractures.

If calcium is an important mineral for our bones, how can it really be bad? Researchers point to the source of the calcium as the culprit. The animal proteins in dairy products increase the acid load of the body and increased acid means the body must find a way to buffer the acid. In order to neutralize the acid, the body uses calcium which comes from the bones.

Not everyone agrees that we should give up on milk. In a 2000 WebMD feature, Connie Weaver, Ph.D., then head of foods and nutrition at Purdue University in West

Lafayette, Indiana, said the amount of calcium lost from drinking milk was inconsequential to the benefit of calcium coming in.

So, if you want healthy bones, what do you do? Focus instead on the many non-disputed calcium rich foods.

"When you think about what supports healthy bone metabolism, think dark green — spinach, broccoli, turnip greens and collard greens. These are all good sources of calcium plus vitamin D," said Karen Roth, a holistic nutritionist with a private practice in the Santa Clarita Valley.

Aside from calcium and magnesium, vitamins D and K, and boron are important to the health of our bones. Vitamin D is difficult to get from foods and usually comes from sun exposure or supplements.

Roth recommends that everyone be tested for Vitamin D. She said a normal level is 30 to 100, but she really recommends being around 60 ng/mL. Ask your doctor to perform a 25-hydroxyvitamin D test or visit www.vitamindcouncil.org and order a test kit to determine your level.

One of the healthiest things to eat every day, according to Roth, is a big green salad loaded with different vegetables and types of lettuce/spinach. A 2005 study from the Journal of Nutrition noted that an avocado added to a salad increases the absorption of phytonutrients from vegetables.

If you are concerned about your bones, Roth also recommends avoiding soda, as it causes calcium to leach from the bones. More resources

can be found on Roth's website at karenrothnutrition.com.

Dr. Roger De Sesa, a certified wellness chiropractic practitioner in Santa Clarita, teaches his clients to stay physically active, eat a variety of whole plant foods, and keep salt intake to a minimum. Sodium affects the balance of calcium in our bodies by increasing the amount we excrete in urine and perspiration, according to the National Institute of Health Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases National Resource Center.

Of course, De Sesa also reiterates the importance of visiting a chiropractor.

"Although people don't think of chiropractors like dentists, they should," he said. "It's as important to maintain a healthy spine as it is a healthy mouth. Regular chiropractic care, which corrects spinal misalignments and optimizes nerve system functioning, makes it possible for your body to properly use your exercise and nutrition to keep your bones healthy and strong."

Spinal misalignments are associated with tight and inflamed spinal ligaments and muscles and restricted mobility in the neck, lower back, and/or mid-back. These factors result in deficient flow of information between the nerve system and the rest of your body. When your cells and tissues aren't receiving the correct information they need, symptoms and disease are the likely result.

More resources can be found on De Sesa's website at www.scvhealthcare.com.

In terms of osteoporosis, regular, vigorous exercise and proper nutrition provide the right setting and the right ingredients for maintaining healthy bones. Weight-bearing exercises are the most beneficial to our bones.

"If you are safe to do so, put a load through your body and pressure on your joints," said Amy Wunsch, a physical therapist at Results Fitness.

For example, add weights when doing squats and lunges. Do not sit on machines, but stand and complete different weight exercises.

"Be sure you go the full range of motion as well," Wunsch added.

"Go all the way down with a squat. Don't cheat and bend forward. It is very important to maintain great posture when doing weight-bearing exercises."

If you are not able to work with a trainer regularly, try an initial consultation to learn the proper posture and form for exercises so that your bones can be loaded correctly. Be sure to follow up a few times a year with the trainer to make sure you are still keeping the right form.

How often you do bone-strengthening exercise depends on each person. Wunsch said someone who needs more time to recover may start twice per week and build up to four times. She also recommends a day break between the weight exercises. That break can incorporate an aerobic or cardio workout instead. Keep in mind that this cardiovascular workout should also be one that puts the body against gravity (e.g., Tai Chi or running). Activities like biking, although good for the cardiovascular system, don't put enough stress on your musculoskeletal system and are actually being shown to decrease bone mineral density (weaken bones).

"You can save yourself a lot of aggravation by doing weighted exercises, which may help you avoid osteoporosis or osteopenia," Wunsch said.

Results Fitness is found at results-fitness.com.